Announced on May 29, 2020, the Safe Start- Washington’s Phased Reopening Plan moves Washington through the phased reopening on a county-by-county basis. The plan allows counties already in Phase 2 to move to Phase 3 with a minimum of three weeks in Phase 2 and with a demonstration of readiness in key areas. Previously, Ferry and Pend Oreille County were given approval to move into Phase 2 on May 8th and Stevens County advanced to Phase 2 on May 11th.

As allowed for under this plan, the earliest that Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties would be eligible to advance to Phase 3 is June 3rd. The process to advance to Phase 3 required the following elements:

- A signed recommendation from the local public health officer to the local board of health;
- A vote from the local board of health to move forward with the request to advance to Phase 3;
- Letter from local hospitals certifying they have adequate bed capacity to serve their communities and adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies to keep their workers safe;
- Request from county commissioners to move to Phase 3; and
- Application information developed by Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD) staff that demonstrates the following:
  - Epidemiologic summary of COVID-19 cases since advancing into Phase 2;
  - Information on where individuals can be tested, how many tests are being done each week in area hospitals and clinics, and percent of positive test results;
  - Number of days between illness onset and testing;
o Process and ability to conduct case investigations and close contact follow-ups;

o Facilities/services available to assist with housing needs for individuals that cannot isolate or quarantine at their own home;

o Capacity of the public health system to respond to outbreaks; and

o Lessons learned during the implementation of Phase 2.

Together with our partners at local hospitals, our NETCHD Board of Health members, and Boards of County Commissioners from Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties, we have been working quickly to get the necessary materials together to submit for advancement into Phase 3. NETCHD Board of Health held a special meeting on June 2, 2020 to discuss advancement to Phase 3 under the Safe Start – Washington’s Phased Reopening Plan. Based on the recommendation by NETCHD Health Officer, Dr. Sam Artzis, the Board of Health voted affirmatively to proceed towards Phase 3. Likewise, each Board of County Commissioners acted quickly in passing resolutions to advance into Phase 3.

The full application was submitted early June 3rd to the Washington State Department of Health Secretary John Wiesman, who will approve or deny the requests. We expect to hear back soon. Until the approval to advance is received, each county (Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens) remain in Phase 2.

As with the advancement to Phase 2, each business sector listed in Phase 3 may expand or reopen only after the state publishes its guidelines for the specific sector. It is hopeful each of these guidelines for Phase 3 will be developed before we receive approval to advance into Phase 3. When this information is published by the Governor’s Office, we will post them on our website at www.netchd.org.

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